

Harrison Tweed Award Winners: The Lafayette Parish Bar Association (LA), the New York State Bar Association, and the Cleveland Bar Association (OH) each received a 2005 Harrison Tweed Award for achievement in preserving and increasing access to legal services.



The LPBA is being honored for its impressive fundraising campaign that benefited providers of civil legal services in Lafayette Parish. Joe Oelkers, President of the LPBA and Executive Director of the Acadiana Legal Service Corporation is shown here (middle) accepting the award. The NYSBA is being recognized for its development of statewide standards to ensure the quality of representation provided to indigent clients entitled to appointed counsel. The CBA is receiving this tribute for its efforts to increase, improve, and coordinate the availability of pro bono legal services in Cleveland.



Vicky O. Kimbrell: Vicky O. Kimbrell received the Dan Bradley Legal Services Award for leading the Georgia Legal Services Program's efforts to serve victims of domestic violence across the state. The award is given annually to an attorney from GLSP or the Atlanta Legal Aid Society who has excelled in providing equal access to justice for the poor.



Montana Legal Services Association: The Montana Legal Services Association (MTLSA) received a Paul H. Chapman award and \$10,000 for using video-conferencing to connect clients with legal aid attorneys across vast distances. The Foundation for Improvement of Justice gives these awards annually for work that improves the justice system.



Legal Aid of the Bluegrass: Legal Aid of the Bluegrass (LABG) was presented with the 2005 Hodson Award, given in recognition of an "outstanding government or public sector law office," by the American Bar Association. Executive Director Richard A. Cullison accepted the award on behalf of the program. LABG is noted for its effective handling of crises in cases involving family law, consumer protection, housing, domestic violence, and elder law.



Legal Aid Attorney Reverend Hill

The Reverend Cheryl Lynn Wofford Hill is used to being called. Called by her God, called by her parishioners, and now, called by her legal aid clients as a practicing legal services attorney at LSC-funded Legal Aid Services of Oklahoma. She has answered by making her life's mission helping people in need.

An ordained United Methodist minister, Hill served various churches throughout Missouri for over 11 years before moving to Oklahoma. "As a pastor, I was privileged to have information about people's lives when they were in crisis," she recalls. "I began to notice a lot of people were having a faith crisis and needing to talk to their pastor because of what were really legal problems."

One experience in particular haunted Hill. Looking out across the congregation one Sunday morning, she noticed a family who were regular attendees sitting in the pews. Little did she know that the following Thursday night would find her trying to calm a hysterical wife who had just been served divorce papers without warning. "The stepdad left a note for the family, and it was discovered by his 11-year old," says Hill. "It just said, 'I'm leaving.' [The papers] said she was supposed to be in her adverse party's lawyer's office the next day to sign [them], and I didn't know that she didn't have to do that."

"I saw her life go downhill from there, and it made me feel that I needed better tools to be able to help people," she adds. "I needed to understand how the law worked."

Enrolling at the Oklahoma City University School of Law in the fall of 1998 was a first step. "When I went to law school, I really was not planning to practice law," she chuckles ruefully. "My motivation for going there was to learn more about the world I lived in so I would have more pastoral care tools."

After an initial bout of timidity, Hill found her voice. She excelled throughout the notoriously difficult first year, catching the attention of the university. Merit scholarships followed, fully financing her legal education.

Her introduction to legal aid came during her first semester of law school when she attended a brown bag lunch event. She eventually began to volunteer in the field, helping to coordinate the Oklahoma City Volunteer Legal Center, a collaboration of educational, religious,

and legal groups which allowed law students to assist pro bono attorneys in legal aid clinics at churches on Sunday mornings. After graduating in May 2001, Hill was offered a part-time position at Legal Aid's HIV/AIDS Legal Resource Project, and eventually a staff attorney position

in the Oklahoma City office. "I have a dual role with legal aid right now," she notes. "I'm an attorney coordinator with the HIV/AIDS Legal Resource Project, and I'm also a staff attorney in the Oklahoma City office mostly doing family law intake."

Both the ministry

and legal services are professions packed with drama and trauma. Hill found the transition between the two to be relatively easy. "As a pastor, I was privileged to see all facets of the family's life," Hill says. "So, those skills that I learned in the pastoral care setting are still very useful to me in talking with people about preparing for end-of-life issues. I'm not afraid to go to the hospital or a nursing home setting to help somebody with a power of attorney. More than that, I learned that one of the gifts that people need from attorneys is just somebody to listen to them."

Hill believes it is by listening to her clients that she earns their trust. "I don't tell my clients that I'm a clergyperson. My style of lawyering involves a lot of the 'lawyer as counselor,' being able to help people think through their legal problems," she admits. "Sometimes their problems do not have legal solutions, so then I just share their outrage at whatever oppression or injustice they've suffered."

This sense of compassion continues to characterize her religious life as well. Officially appointed as Director of Legal Ministries by Skyline Urban Ministry in Oklahoma City, Hill also ministers as a member of the Oklahoma Conference and at Redemption Church, a prison ministry. "The church understands that what I'm doing here as a lawyer is an extension of the church's many ministries to provide legal services to the poor," she says.

"Many of the attorneys at legal aid are here because of a sense of calling. They understand that a component of whatever their faith belief system is...is to reach out to their neighbor and to provide assistance when they have the ability to help," Hill believes. "I'm so glad that I have a way to help people who are suffering."

